THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) The annual expenditure of the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), under plan head for the year 2003-2004 was Rs. 40.50 crore. For the year 2004-2005, there is a provision of Rs. 44 crore this head. The prcject outlay for the year 2005-06 is Rs. 52 crore.

(b) Some of the reasons for making higher allocation are i) the expansion and diversiflcation of aquaculture; ii) additional projects for technological development in hatcheries, farms etc. to promote scampi, seabass/ grouper culture, production of artemia cyst and lobster fattening etc.; and iii) to upgrade facilities in pre-processing and processing units to meet the European Union (EU) and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) quality and hygienic standard.

Trade Deficit

175. SHRI MURLI DEORA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether trade deficit during April-December, 2004 has widened;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor;

(c) whether imports during the first three quarters of the financial year 2004-05 has also increased substantially;

(d) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(e) the steps taken to contain the imbalance in exports and imports?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. A trade deficit amounting to US $20.15 billion was recorded during April-December, 2004-05 which is 71.34% higher than US $11.76 billion recorded during the corresponding period of previous year.

(c) and (d) Imports during the first three quarters i.e, April-December, 2004-05 are valued at US$ 73.65 billion respresenting an increase of 33.64% over the corresponding period of previous year. The main reasons for increase in imports are the sharp increase in crude oil prices and gold prices in the world market and increase in demand of inputs for

manufacturing sector which registered a significant increase during this period.

(e) There are no measures to restrict imports or artificially balance trade that may led to dampening of the growth of the economy or lead to resurgence of inflationary pressures. However, export promotion is a constant endeavor of the Government and a Foreign Trade Policy was announced on 31st August, 2004 with the objective of doubling India's overall share of global merchandise trade within the next five years.

Opening of Auction Centres of Tobacco Board

176. SHRI V. HANUMATHA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is demand to open more auction centres of the Tobacco Board in Andhra Pradesh;

(b) the steps proposed to ensure that all tobacco farmers get their tobacco easily to the auction centres;

(c) whether the Tobacco Board will give any transport subsidy to farmers for bringing their tobacco to the auction centres;

(d) the steps proposed to increase such facilities for the tobacco farmers; and

(e) the measures proposed in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Tobacco Board is implementing cluster approach by rotation to ensure that all growers get equal opportunity to sell their tobacco.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) and (e) Do not arise.

Impact of Tsunami on Marine Exports

177. SHRI V. HANUMATHA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state: